

# THE EFFECTS OF TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING ON ADULT EFL BEGINNERS' SPEAKING ABILITY IN AN ONLINE CLASSROOM

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored the effects of task-based language teaching (TBLT) on the speaking ability of adult EFL beginners in an online classroom. Thirty learners participated in an English conversation course, and their speaking performance was measured through a pre-test, three mid-tests, and a final test. A one-way repeated measures ANOVA showed that learners' speaking skills significantly improved, especially after TBLT lessons. The third mid-test, which followed two TBLT sessions, showed the highest average scores. This suggests that TBLT has a stronger impact on speaking development than non-TBLT methods. Students' feedback also revealed important insights. Most participants responded positively to TBLT, noting that the interactive and real-life tasks helped them speak more naturally and confidently. However, some still felt anxious or unsure about what to do during tasks, which highlights a need for clearer task instructions and more teacher support. These mixed reactions suggest that while TBLT can be very effective, it must be carefully planned to suit learners' needs and comfort levels. Overall, the findings support the use of TBLT to improve speaking skills in adult EFL learners, especially in online settings. At the same time, the results point to areas that require attention, such as task clarity and emotional support. This study adds to the growing evidence for TBLT's effectiveness and offers a base for future research on how to make it even more learner-friendly and adaptable to different teaching contexts.

**Keywords:** Task-Based Language Teaching, Speaking Ability, EFL Learner, Online Classroom

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## INTRODUCTION

Learning a second language, especially speaking, is crucial for effective communication and daily tasks. Speaking ability reflects how well learners can use English in real-life situations (Akhter et al., 2020; Bounzouay, 2020). As Rao (2019) notes, EFL classrooms are ideal spaces to develop these skills through consistent speaking practice. However, learners often face challenges such as understanding accents, lack of confidence, grammatical errors, and teacher-centered environments that limit interaction (Afifah & Devana, 2020; Nuemaihom et al., 2018; Yuh & Kaewurai, 2021). These barriers are particularly pronounced for adult learners in Thailand, with Education First (2023) ranking Thai adults 101st out of 113 countries in English proficiency, highlighting the need for more effective teaching methods. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) offers a promising approach by focusing on communication through meaningful tasks rather than traditional grammar-based instruction. TBLT promotes active language use in real-world contexts, enhancing fluency and confidence (Dos Santos, 2020; Ellis, 2003). Compared to conventional methods, TBLT encourages more natural communication and interaction, which has been shown to improve fluency and reduce hesitation in young learners (Beding & Inthapthim, 2019; Pham & Do, 2021; Sahrawi, 2017). However, research on TBLT's impact on adult learners, particularly beginners, remains limited. Given the link between English proficiency and career opportunities, exploring teaching strategies that cater to adult learners is essential. This study aims to investigate the effects of TBLT on beginner-level adult EFL learners' speaking skills in an online environment, while also examining their perceptions of TBLT. Previous studies suggest that positive learning experiences foster motivation and deeper learning strategies (Fraser & Fisher, 1982), and supportive classroom environments encourage critical thinking (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1990). Understanding adult learners' responses to TBLT could provide valuable insights for enhancing English instruction in Thailand.

## LITERATURE REVIEWS

### **Communicative Teaching Approach**

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach prioritizes real communication, aiming to enhance learners' ability to use language effectively in everyday situations through interactive tasks (Thamarana, 2015; Toro et al., 2019; Alakrash, 2021; Teh, 2021). As Savignon (1991) emphasized, CLT focuses not only on grammar but on the process of using language in meaningful, social contexts to develop both linguistic and communication skills. Introduced in the 1970s, CLT encourages learner-centered activities, providing students with more opportunities for practical language use (Alakrash, 2021). However, its success depends on the teacher's ability to design engaging, interactive lessons and create a supportive learning environment (Athawadi, 2019). The CLT approach is grounded in several language theories. Hymes' communicative competence theory (Solomon, 1996) underscores the importance of using language appropriately in various social settings, not just mastering grammar. Halliday's functional linguistic theory (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013) emphasizes language as a tool for conveying meaning in diverse contexts. Widdowson (1978) and Canale and Swain (1980) highlight the importance of both linguistic and pragmatic competence for effective communication, forming the theoretical basis of CLT. Additionally, CLT recognizes language learning as a social and cultural process, with Ma (2009) noting that it involves not just words but understanding context, intention, and culture. For effective implementation, CLT requires competent teachers, motivated students, adequate educational support, and appropriate resources (Chang & Goswami, 2011). Teachers need to be well-versed in CLT principles and methods, while students should be motivated and see the practical value of learning English. Schools must align curricula with CLT principles and provide the necessary resources to support this approach. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), a subset of CLT, exemplifies

how real-life tasks can be used to build communication skills (Skehan, 1998; Willis & Willis, 2007). For CLT to succeed, all these elements must work together to promote real-world language learning.

### **Communicative Competence**

Speaking is a critical language skill that plays a pivotal role in communication. While all language skills—listening, reading, writing, and speaking—are essential for language proficiency, speaking is particularly vital for expressing ideas and fostering social connections (Dilobar, 2022). It is integral to communicative competence, which goes beyond grammatical knowledge to include the ability to engage effectively in social interactions (Halimovna et al., 2019; Ma, 2009). Hymes (1967) emphasized that communicative competence involves the ability to use language appropriately in different contexts, including discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic competencies. These components are necessary for effective communication in real-life situations. Holliday (1994) proposed a framework for communicative teaching that emphasizes enhancing learners' existing language abilities through relevant tasks. His approach underscores the social nature of language learning, where language serves as a tool for interaction and meaning-making. It also highlights the importance of learner autonomy and peer interaction, positioning learners at the center of the learning process. Similarly, Habermas (1970) argued that communicative competence extends beyond linguistic knowledge to include the ability to interact meaningfully, stressing that effective communication involves both linguistic proficiency and social skills. Wiemann (1977) further developed this concept by presenting interaction management as a key aspect of communicative competence, which includes empathy, flexibility, and support in social interactions. This approach aligns with earlier theories on social skills (Argyle, 1969) and self-presentation (Goffman, 1967), emphasizing the interpersonal dimensions of communication. In conclusion, communicative competence involves both linguistic and social abilities, enabling individuals to navigate diverse social contexts. Approaches by Holliday, Habermas, and Wiemann emphasize the need for language learning to promote authentic communication, where learners not only gain linguistic proficiency but also develop the skills necessary for meaningful interactions.

### **Task-based Learning for Speaking**

Task-Based Learning (TBL), or Task-Based Instruction (TBI), is a learner-centered approach that focuses on meaningful language use through tasks relevant to students' academic or professional contexts (Swan, 2005; Harden, 2000). TBL encourages learners to work at their own pace while actively reorganizing their interlanguage. This method has proven to enhance engagement and retention, particularly in vocabulary acquisition, and it fosters the development of speaking skills and confidence (Afifah & Devana, 2020; Safitri et al., 2020). It also improves pronunciation through collaborative activities that reduce anxiety and create a supportive environment (Rojanacheewinsupond, 2009). Group work is essential to TBL, as it promotes interaction, peer feedback, and self-evaluation, allowing learners to monitor progress and identify areas for improvement. However, TBL presents challenges, particularly the potential trade-off between fluency and accuracy. Skehan (1996) warned that an overemphasis on meaning might lead learners to prioritize communication over grammatical precision, which may hinder deeper language development. Skehan (1998) later highlighted the importance of informed decision-making and adequate resources for both teachers and learners. Carless (2003) also pointed out practical challenges such as teacher attitudes, time constraints, student proficiency, and classroom management, all of which can impact the success of TBL. A lack of teacher confidence or poor material planning can significantly affect student engagement and learning outcomes. Despite these challenges, TBL remains a strong approach within communicative language teaching. Bone et al. (2019) suggested that TBL's effectiveness can be enhanced by personalizing tasks, allowing for sufficient practice time, incorporating authentic communication, and integrating technology. Ultimately, while TBL offers an

engaging and practical method to develop speaking skills, its success depends on careful planning, teacher readiness, and the ability to adapt the approach to learners' needs and contexts.

### **Online Speaking Tutoring**

Task-based learning (TBL) has emerged as a promising method for improving speaking skills, especially in online environments. However, the effectiveness of platforms like Google Classroom and Zoom in enhancing speaking proficiency, particularly for first-semester students, is still debated (Avisina et al., 2022). A major challenge is the lack of face-to-face interaction, which many students feel limits their opportunities to practice speaking. This preference for offline methods highlights the limitations of virtual platforms in facilitating language acquisition. Englishtina et al. (2021) identify technical issues such as unstable internet connections and device compatibility problems, which hinder the learning process and make students favor offline communication. To address these concerns, they recommend improving technical infrastructure and incorporating interactive strategies like games and apps to boost engagement in online learning. Despite these challenges, TBL offers an effective solution by encouraging active participation and real-world language use in virtual classrooms. However, Englishtina et al. (2021) argue that instructors play a crucial role in overcoming students' fears of making mistakes and lack of confidence, which can impede participation in online speaking tasks. By adopting engaging teaching methods and creating a supportive environment, instructors can help students feel more comfortable and confident. Despite these advantages, there remains limited research on effective assessment and feedback strategies for online TBL. Further studies are necessary to explore the best ways to assess and provide feedback in virtual settings. Chan (2017) highlights that student motivations, such as preparing for university tests or pursuing scholarships, influence their engagement in online language courses. Understanding these motivations can help design task-based activities that align with students' goals. Wibowo et al. (2020) also found that students were dissatisfied with online public speaking courses due to technical issues and limited practice, suggesting that a blended learning approach combining online and offline methods may be more effective. In conclusion, while TBL has potential, addressing technical challenges, enhancing student motivation, and improving assessment methods are key to its success in online environments. Further research is needed to optimize its implementation.

### **The Effects of a TBLT Approach on Young Thai EFL Learners in Thailand**

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has been consistently shown to enhance learners' speaking abilities, with numerous studies supporting its effectiveness. Research by Beding and Inthapthim (2019), Kanoksilapatham and Suranakkharin (2019), and Thiratchapon (2021) highlights improvements in speaking skills, such as fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation, when TBLT is implemented. Additionally, TBLT has been linked to increased motivation and confidence, with Nget et al. (2020) and Ulla & Perales (2021) noting that students are more willing to engage in communication, thereby boosting their speaking performance. The approach also fosters creativity, interaction, and learner independence (McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2011; Pietri, 2015), contributing to a more engaging and dynamic classroom environment. A study by Nget et al. (2020) on Thai EFL students found that TBLT led to significant improvements in speaking, particularly through task types such as dialogues and opinion gaps. These tasks allowed learners to practice language in authentic, real-world contexts, thus enhancing their interaction skills and overall communicative competence. Moreover, TBLT promotes the integration of various language components, such as fluency and vocabulary, during speaking activities (Nita et al., 2020), fostering more holistic language development. However, while the positive outcomes of TBLT in improving speaking skills are evident, more research is needed, particularly for adult learners. Adults often have distinct learning goals and challenges compared to younger students, and understanding how TBLT

can address these factors is crucial. Future research should focus on adult learners to explore how TBLT can be tailored to meet their unique needs and enhance its effectiveness in diverse educational settings.

### **The Young Thai EFL Learners' Perceptions about Incorporating a TBLT Approach into Their Classroom Learning**

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has been widely regarded positively by learners, with studies by Beding & Inthapthim (2019), Kanoksilapatham & Suranakkharin (2019), and others showing its effectiveness in improving speaking skills. However, Thiratchapon (2021) highlights an important nuance: while TBLT is generally beneficial, students have indicated that refining the tasks could further enhance its effectiveness. This points to the necessity of careful task design to fully optimize the approach. For TBLT to be maximally effective, teachers must dedicate significant effort to crafting well-structured, engaging lesson plans that align with learners' goals, ensuring that the tasks are both motivating and relevant. Moreover, creating opportunities for students to practice outside of formal class settings is crucial for continuous language development. Engaging in real-life communication helps bridge the gap between classroom learning and practical language use (Beding & Inthapthim, 2019; Kanoksilapatham & Suranakkharin, 2019). Scaffolding, which involves providing targeted support when necessary, also plays a critical role. While TBLT encourages learner autonomy, teacher intervention is essential for overcoming challenges, building confidence, and facilitating deeper language connections (Thiratchapon, 2021; Pietri, 2015). A balance between independent learning and appropriate teacher guidance ensures optimal language acquisition. In summary, although TBLT is well-received by learners, effective implementation requires attention to task design, beyond-classroom practice, and scaffolding support. By addressing student feedback and refining tasks, teachers can improve the learning experience and outcomes. Furthermore, the limited research on adult EFL learners in Thailand suggests a gap in understanding how TBLT can be tailored to meet their unique needs, warranting further exploration to assess its applicability and effectiveness in this context.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a single-group pre-test and post-test design, combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to examine the impact of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) on adult English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' speaking skills and perceptions. The participants were 30 adult learners, all holding a bachelor's degree, with English proficiency levels ranging from A2 to B1 (Nunan, 2004). To ensure the appropriate proficiency level, a pre-test, identical to the proficiency test used for participant selection, was administered. The independent variable was the TBLT approach, while speaking abilities (DV1) and learners' perceptions of TBLT (DV2) were the dependent variables. Although the sample size of 30 participants provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of TBLT, it was relatively small for robust statistical analysis, and this limitation must be acknowledged. Moreover, the lack of a control group restricted the ability to definitively attribute any improvements to the TBLT intervention alone, as factors such as maturation or testing effects might have influenced the outcomes. Future studies should consider including a control group, preferably one that follows traditional teaching methods, to better isolate the effects of TBLT. Alternatively, a quasi-experimental design with a comparison group could be explored. Speaking abilities were assessed using a rubric adapted from Brown (2001), focusing on grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and pronunciation. The rubric was detailed, with specific criteria such as grammatical accuracy, vocabulary range, fluency, coherence, and pronunciation, each scored on a 5-point scale. Participants' perceptions of TBLT were measured using a questionnaire developed in collaboration with Professor Chen Jung-Han, based on a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire, adapted from Huang (2015) and Nget et al.

(2020), consisted of 24 items grouped into four sections: Features of TBLT, Usefulness of TBLT, Affective Reactions, and Future Expectations. The study lasted for 4 weeks, with 8 lessons in total, two per week. Weeks 1 and 3 followed the TBLT approach, while Weeks 2 and 4 employed traditional, grammar-based teaching. The regular teaching method used in Weeks 2 and 4 involved explicit grammar explanations, vocabulary drills, and textbook exercises, with a focus on accuracy and grammatical correctness rather than communicative fluency. In contrast, Weeks 1 and 3 emphasized task-based activities designed to foster communicative competence and real-world language use. This design allowed for a direct comparison between the effects of TBLT and traditional teaching methods. The task-based framework was informed by Nunan (2004), Prabhu (1987), Pattison (1987), and Richards (2001), with materials adapted from English Unlimited B1 Pre-intermediate (Cambridge). Data were collected through online questionnaires and speaking proficiency tests. The pre-test, three mid-tests, and final test assessed speaking abilities using the speaking rubric. Data were analyzed using SPSS Statistics, with a one-way repeated measures ANOVA addressing Research Question 1 (RQ1) and descriptive statistics analyzing the questionnaire results for Research Question 2. While this methodology provided a comprehensive evaluation of the impact of TBLT on learners' speaking abilities and perceptions, the small sample size and absence of a control group limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should consider replicating the study with a larger sample size, incorporating a control group, and exploring other factors, such as task design and learner readiness, that may influence the effectiveness of TBLT.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

### **The Effects of Task-Based Language Teaching on Adult EFL Beginners' Speaking Ability in an Online Classroom**

The results of the study provide strong evidence for the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in improving adult EFL learners' speaking abilities. The one-way repeated measures ANOVA, comparing pre-TBLT, TBLT, and non-TBLT conditions, showed significant improvements in speaking scores from the pre-test to the mid-tests and final test. Specifically, the pre-test mean score was 11.60 ( $SD = 2.40$ ), while scores for the mid-tests ranged from 13.07 (without TBLT) to 16.13 (with TBLT), and the final test score was 14.17 ( $SD = 2.25$ ). The ANOVA results ( $F(4,116) = 96.87, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.29$ ) suggest that teaching method had a substantial effect on speaking abilities, with  $\eta^2 = 0.29$  indicating a large effect size based on Cohen's (1988) benchmarks. In practical terms, the observed improvement of approximately 4.5 points from the pre-test to the highest mid-test (Mid-test 3) reflects meaningful progress in learners' ability to engage in real-world conversations. This magnitude of change suggests not just statistical significance but also a noticeable enhancement in everyday communication skills, such as fluency, coherence, and interactional competence. Compared to previous studies (e.g., Beding & Inthapthim, 2019; Kanoksilapatham & Suranakkharin, 2019), which also reported moderate to large effect sizes, the findings are consistent and reinforce TBLT's practical benefits. Pairwise comparisons revealed significant differences, particularly between the final test and Mid-test 2 (without TBLT), with a mean difference of 6.06 ( $p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.45$ ), indicating a very large effect. This strengthens the argument that TBLT's emphasis on authentic, interactive tasks results in deeper and more meaningful language gains. Although traditional methods also led to some improvement, their smaller effect suggests that learners might only experience modest gains in speaking fluency without the communicative, real-world focus of TBLT (Ellis, 2003). While traditional approaches remain useful in certain settings, this study highlights that TBLT more effectively prepares learners for practical language use. Future research could investigate how blending

TBLT with traditional methods may enhance both linguistic accuracy and communicative competence to a greater extent.

### **Students' Perceptions about Incorporating a TBLT Approach into Their Classroom Learning of English**

The students' perceptions of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in this study were generally positive, particularly regarding speaking tasks, which were viewed as well-structured and interactive. High ratings for task design ( $M = 4.07$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ) and interactivity ( $M = 4.0$ ,  $SD = 0.53$ ) suggest that TBLT effectively promoted engagement and communication, aligning with Ellis's (2003) argument that task-based learning enhances meaningful communication. Participants appreciated opportunities to practice speaking ( $M = 4.20$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ) and generally understood the teacher's instructions ( $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ). However, the relatively low score on task purpose clarity ( $M = 2.23$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ) highlights a critical area for improvement, suggesting that task transparency is essential to maximize learners' understanding and participation. Further analysis revealed moderate positive correlations between learners' perceptions of task design and their speaking performance gains ( $r = 0.41$ ), indicating that students who rated the tasks more favorably tended to achieve better speaking outcomes. Similarly, students who reported higher enjoyment of speaking activities also demonstrated stronger performance improvements, suggesting that affective engagement is an important factor in language learning success. In terms of perceived usefulness, most students agreed that TBLT helped improve their speaking ability ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ), vocabulary ( $M = 3.93$ ,  $SD = 0.78$ ), and pronunciation ( $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ), though its impact on grammar development was perceived as weaker ( $M = 3.77$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ), reflecting TBLT's known emphasis on fluency over grammatical accuracy (Ellis, 2003). Affective responses were mixed: while enjoyment ( $M = 4.30$ ,  $SD = 0.53$ ) and confidence speaking English with peers ( $M = 3.87$ ,  $SD = 0.78$ ) were generally high, feelings of fear ( $M = 2.37$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ) and anxiety ( $M = 2.40$ ,  $SD = 0.77$ ) remained concerns for some learners. These emotional factors were negatively correlated with speaking performance ( $r = -0.36$ ), suggesting that anxiety may hinder active participation and language growth, consistent with Akhter et al. (2020). Despite some resistance ( $M = 1.97$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ), a strong majority expressed willingness to continue with speaking tasks ( $M = 4.03$ - $4.17$ ,  $SD = 0.53$ - $0.74$ ). Overall, while TBLT appears effective in enhancing engagement and speaking abilities, the findings point to the need for clearer task objectives and stronger emotional support strategies to optimize its benefits across diverse learner profiles.

## **DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION**

This study confirms that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) significantly enhances the speaking skills of adult English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Thailand, aligning with previous research on the positive effects of TBLT in improving language proficiency (Afifah & Devana, 2020; Ellis, 2003). What sets this study apart is its focus on adult learners in an online Thai educational context, a group that has been underrepresented in TBLT research. This unique contribution adds depth to the existing body of knowledge, showing that adult learners also benefit from task-based, communicative approaches, similar to younger learners (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980). However, the study also reveals some challenges that differ from earlier studies. While TBLT is effective in fostering speaking skills, the success of the approach depends heavily on how tasks are designed and supported. For example, students in this study expressed confusion about unclear task objectives and experienced anxiety during speaking tasks, which indicates that careful scaffolding and clear instructions are critical for effective implementation (Akhter et al., 2020; Thiratchapon, 2021). These findings contrast with those of previous research that highlighted TBLT's general effectiveness, suggesting that task design must be more flexible and sensitive to learners' needs. Additionally, this study reflects concerns raised by Englishtina et al. (2021) regarding

online learning contexts, where technical difficulties and larger class sizes can reduce the effectiveness of TBLT. This contrasts with more traditional settings, where smaller class sizes and face-to-face interactions facilitate greater task engagement. Considering these findings, the study offers several practical recommendations for practitioners: providing clear instructions, matching task complexity to learners' proficiency, maintaining smaller class sizes in online contexts, and fostering a supportive learning environment to reduce anxiety. These strategies are in line with earlier studies but add the layer of context-specific adjustments for online learning. Lastly, while the study contributes valuable insights into TBLT's application for adult learners in online environments, it also highlights the need for further research, particularly focusing on long-term proficiency retention, comparisons of different task types, and teacher training in TBLT implementation. This will help refine the approach and expand its applicability to various educational settings.

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